

## SPECIAL POPULATIONS

### **Profile of the issue:**

As the population of Snohomish County grows dramatically, we are also experiencing large increases in the diversity of our citizenry. County government is sensitive to providing services for all of the community. According to Snohomish County Joint Resolution No. 99-009, "providing equitable and quality services requires that the County recognize the increasing diversity of our residents..."

The Older Americans Act establishes a preference for providing services to older individuals with the greatest economic and social needs and older individuals in rural areas, with particular attention to low income minority individuals. Snohomish County is committed to serving those populations as well as individuals with limited English proficiency, older individuals with Alzheimer's disease or related disorders, individuals with disabilities of all types, and individuals in non-traditional families.

### Ethnically Diverse Populations

Nationally and locally, we are experiencing an explosion in the ethnic diversity of our population. Washington ranks 4<sup>th</sup> nationwide in terms of total population growth of people of color and ethnically diverse communities.<sup>1</sup> Snohomish County also ranks in the very top percentage nation-wide of non-white population growth. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of persons of color in Snohomish County grew from 37,586 to 100,826, an increase of 168.3%.

As is the case in the total population, diversity among Snohomish County elders is increasing. Between 2000 and 2006, individuals 60+ years old, who are persons of color, increased 42.2% while non-Hispanic white elders increased by only 19.1%. This trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Of the 4,728 persons age 65 and over who reported in the 2000 Census that they spoke a language other than English at home, 1,563 (33.1%) reported they spoke English not well or not at all. The number of persons age 65 and over reporting that they spoke English not well or not at all increased from 664 in the 1990 Census to 1,563 in the 2000 Census, an increase of 135.4%.

Snohomish County has made strides in providing services to aging ethnic communities. There are culturally relevant congregate meal programs with social services provided by bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff, and specialized transportation. There are also bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff members who perform case management duties for those on COPES or Medicaid Personal Care services, and Senior Information and Assistance has several bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff.

---

<sup>1</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, Sept. 30, 2004

However, social and language barriers often mean isolation for these communities. They are less likely to have culturally relevant services available to them, and are less likely to be able to access existing services.

#### Persons with Disabilities

In Washington State, the 2000 Census shows 18.2% (981,000) of the population aged 5 or older has a disability. The number for Snohomish County is 16.8% or 93,121. The number of persons with disabilities aged 65+ rises to 42.3% of the state population, and 42.8% of the County population (54,405).

Persons with disabilities face many barriers – personal, social, emotional, and economic. They are less likely to access services, although they often need assistance with housing options, transportation, employment, socialization, personal care, and medical access.

#### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Community

There are approximately 3 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) seniors in the United States, and it is estimated that by the year 2030, this number will almost double.<sup>2</sup> Estimates of LGBT individuals in any community range from 3% to 10% of the total population. Given this estimate, there were between 2,700 and 9,000 older (60+) LGBT individuals living within the County in 2006.

LGBT seniors face the same challenges as other seniors, such as access to adequate health care and affordable housing, but they also face unique challenges, such as financial vulnerability when they experience the death of a partner, or an incapacity that requires long-term care. For example, LGBT seniors with lifelong partners are unable to access Social Security survivor or spousal benefits, and are often unable to participate in important decision making during end of life or nursing home care for their partners. In addition, while Medicaid regulations protect the assets and homes of married individuals when nursing home or long-term care is needed, same-sex couples are not offered the same protection. Furthermore, many LGBT seniors experience social isolation as a result of homophobia in their own communities, and ageism within the larger communities in which they live.

**Problem/Need Statement:** Many special populations face barriers to their full participation in society due to discrimination, social isolation, physical and mental disabilities, and/or lack of visibility. These groups often need specialized services or assistance in accessing services.

**Goal:** Expand awareness of the needs of non-majority populations and advocate for specialized programs to address these needs.

---

<sup>2</sup> National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, <http://www.thetaskforce.org/issues/aging>

**Objective:** Promote inclusion of ethnically diverse populations, developmentally disabled individuals, and cognitively impaired individuals as aging services recipients.

**Measurable Activity:** Organize trainings on dementia competency for aging providers and law enforcement personnel. December 2008.

**Measurable Activity:** Organize trainings on cultural competency for aging providers by December 2009.

**Measurable Activity:** Advocate for a multicultural senior center to provide culturally relevant services for our non-majority populations. December 2010

**Measurable Activity:** Partner with other aging providers in sponsoring and organizing a yearly Ethnic Elders Resource Fair. Ongoing.

**Measurable Activity:** Partner with other agencies in providing culturally appropriate nutrition information and disease-specific information to ethnically diverse groups. Ongoing



'Grandma" by Haylei

Age 4

Stanwood